

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES POLICY ON REMOTE TESTIMONY

The House has a longstanding commitment to civic engagement and public participation in the legislative process, and honors its commitment in numerous ways. For example, the House has a robust tradition of receiving open testimony from interested persons during public hearings on bills and other measures. In addition, to facilitate communication between the public and representatives, the House uses a toll-free hotline and an e-comment system that allow the public to provide written statements and other commentary on pending legislation.

The House seeks to examine remote testimony as an additional means of receiving open testimony during public hearings, and particularly, a way in which interested persons may sign in, be recognized, and speak during public hearings on bills or other measures that is similar to the way in which they participate at the Capitol. Therefore, the use of remote testimony in standing committees is authorized as a pilot program in 2020 as described in this policy.

Committees and Bills

Remote testimony is authorized in the following three standing committees: College & Workforce Development; Housing, Community Development & Veterans; and Local Government. Only one committee may be scheduled for remote testimony during a single meeting time. The specific committee will be determined on a first-requested, first-served basis. The meeting time must be regularly-scheduled and listed in the 2020 Session Planner.

The Chair and the Ranking Member must mutually select any bill to be scheduled for remote testimony, and notify the Staff Director for the Office of Program Research or their designee of the selections via email by noon on Tuesday of the week before the meeting. The Chair and the Ranking Member are encouraged to schedule bills for remote testimony during meetings when no executive action is planned and during weeks when no committee cut-offs are calendared. Upon receipt, the Office of Program Research and the Legislative Service Center will take steps necessary for remote testimony. No bill may be added for remote testimony after this deadline.

The availability of remote testimony for a particular bill will be listed in meeting notices in Legislative Meeting Schedules, listserv notices, and online, and also announced using strategies to enhance public awareness. Links to a web-based sign-in system for remote testimony will be included.

Remote Sites

Remote testimony may be received via audio-video connections only from specific remote sites. Teleconference or other audio-only connections from the sites may be used as needed.

Up to four remote sites may be scheduled for remote testimony for a single meeting. The specific sites will be determined based on: (1) public interest from a specific site registered via a web-based sign-in system with time stamps; and (2) availability of the specific site(s).

The web-based sign-in system will open by noon on Thursday of the week before the meeting, and close as follows:

- If there is no public interest in remote testimony from a site at least 24 weekday hours before the hearing, the sign-in system for that site will be closed and no one may sign in for that site.
- Two weekday hours before the hearing, the sign-in system for all sites will be closed and no one may sign in for any site.

Agreements should be entered into for the use of a specific public facility, such as a community college, as the remote site in each of the following four locations: Bellingham, Ellensburg, Spokane, and the Tri-Cities. Facilities must be neutral and ADA-accessible. Costs for facilities must be reasonable and based on low standard or government rates.

Procedures and Decorum

Interested persons at remote sites, whether signed in to testify or not, will be subject to the same rules of decorum as those at the Capitol. They must be recognized by the Chair before speaking and may be required to limit their comments. There is no guarantee that interested persons who sign in will be allowed to speak or able to speak at specific times.

Evaluation

By July 1, 2020, an evaluation of the pilot program shall be completed and submitted to the House Executive Rules Committee. The evaluation must include:

- Bills scheduled for remote testimony
- Public interest in remote testimony based on: (1) registration via the web-based sign-in system; (2) attendance at remote sites; and (3) participation in meetings
- Staff resources needed at the Capitol and remote sites
- Technology and equipment needed at the Capitol and remote sites
- Total costs of remote testimony, including specific costs for staff, technology, equipment, and facilities
- Surveys of remote testimony participants and others signed up for email notifications from participating committees, including any general comments
- Geographic segmentation of remote testimony participants and others
- Status of remote testimony participants as registered lobbyists or general public
- Feedback from members, staff, participants, and others
- Recommendations for remote testimony in the future